



Evelyn Spellman, who has served as general manager of Farrell & Eddy, talks about the upcoming last day of business, which was Saturday. History on the Farrell family, which founded the store on the corner of Fourth and Birch back in 1903, is on pages B1 and B2. Staff photo by Cameron Hardy.

End of an Era

Memories shared as Farrell and Eddy closes

By Mara Stine
Post-Record Staff

She unlocks the store's front doors, turns on the lights and counts out the till. In so many ways it's just another day at Farrell & Eddy. But this day — Saturday, May 9 — is quite different. It's the last day for Evelyn Spellman, who has been general manager for the past 24 years.

After almost 100 years in business, Farrell and Eddy closed its doors at 5:30 p.m.

Spellman started working at the store one fall day in 1974, but her association with the business began much earlier.

Her parents were schoolmates of Glenn, the Farrell's son, and Helen, who later became his wife. If fact, Spellman's father, who was one of Helen's neighbors, gave her a ride on her first day of school.

This close family friendship turned into consumer loyalty: The 72-year-old has shopped at the department store her entire life and she started working there in 1974. While going through a divorce, Spellman found herself telling Glenn about her life and mentioned she was looking for work.

He offered her a job and she's been there ever since. Beginning as a clerk, one of two employees, she

worked alongside Glenn, who she remembers as an honest stickler for details.

"He was the most honest person I have ever known," Spellman says during the last days of Farrell & Eddy's going out of business sale. "If the bank statement was off by one cent in favor of the bank, he would go to the bank and straighten it out."

She helped buy merchandise and assist customers. And then in the late '80s, when Glenn's health began to fail, she took on more responsibilities. Spellman started planning displays, working with the salespeople, going to market day in Seattle and making appointments with buyers to peruse samples.

"It was a lot of fun but challenging," she recalls. "You have to really know your customer."

Not only that but everything must be ordered far in advance. Spring merchandise was selected in the fall, so she had to predict what would be popular six months down the road.

Then when Glenn went to Germany for a month, she stepped into his shoes.

The hardest thing, she says, was just keeping the day-to-day operations running smoothly. All would go well and someone would have a return or a pipe in the old building would break, flooding the basement.

"There were always little emergencies," she says.

—Evelyn Spellman

See Spellman, page A3

Spellman

Continued from page A1

Emergencies like Thursday's air conditioning leak, a recurring problem in warmer weather. A metal trash can with a plastic liner sits underneath it, collecting water.

She also started learning the ropes of bookkeeping, banking and accounting. When he died in 1989, she wasn't sure she could take over his position, so Spellman wasn't about to volunteer for it.

But Glenda Farrell Schuh, one of the founder's granddaughters and an owner of the store, is glad she was receptive to the idea.

"She carried on where he left off," she says.

"I was very green," Spellman remembers. "I got out his books. The only way I could do it was to do it the way he did it."

While her memories bubble up, customers come in chatting about how sad they are to see the business go.

"How are you doing with it?" asks Kathy Douglas of Washougal, who is shopping for her mom in California.

Spellman brushes off her concern, saying the closing is sad, but she's fine. Things have been so busy, the reality of it hasn't quite sunk in yet. Besides, her concern is for the Farrells, not for herself.

"So, what are you going to do, sweetie?" Douglas continues. "Are you going to retire?"

Oh, she's got plenty to do like golfing and gardening — if this old body holds out, Spellman says. Plus there's her 28-month-old grandson, Danner, who she'd like to spend more time with.

At the checkout counter, Spellman

rings up Douglas' purchases on the register harking back to the 1930s.

"There you go, there's her last outfit from Farrell & Eddy," Douglas says, sighing as she looks at the teal shorts and matching teal and white striped top. "It better fit her. If it doesn't, we're out of luck."

When Spellman first started at Farrell & Eddy, white dress shirts and ties for men were going out and leisure suits were coming in. Calls for dressy dresses became fewer and farther between. A couple mother-of-the-bride dresses were always kept on hand, but even those didn't sell too often.

And the day goes on. Mail has to be sorted. Bills must be paid. Customers

need to be helped. Two turbans reserved for the name Morgan come out from under a front counter hidden away in brown paper bags decorated with only the simple gilded words Farrell & Eddy.

Drawers and shelves once filled with children's clothes are empty. Display cases are bare. Boxes of Berkshire hosiery — the long, sheer stockings folded and wrapped in tissue paper, surrounded by a pale blue strip of paper — are stacked on a glass display case.

As the clock ticks toward 5:30 p.m., brown paper is placed over windows and doors. The till is counted one last time and curtains are

pulled closed. One by one, the lights go out — first the overheads, next those that for the past week illuminated empty shelves and then the spotlight-like ones in the window displays.

There's a lot that Spellman will miss about her job — especially the customers, her co-workers, who are like an extended family, and the Farrell family.

"I just loved every minute of it," she says. "You couldn't find a more wonderful family to work for. ... It's so much easier to work when everyone is a friend. ... That's what makes it so hard to let go. It's hard to hold the tears back."

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